

July 12, 2026

Matthew 13:1-9:

“Let Us Be Wasteful Sowers”

- I. Seed That Appears Wasted
- II. The Power of the Seed
- III. Let Us Be Wasteful Sowers

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Let Us Be Wasteful Sowers

Matthew 13:1-9

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Among the many unique life cycles we observe in creation, the salmon's life cycle stands out as a remarkable testimony to God's wisdom in ordering His creation. At the right time, female salmon lay anywhere from 1,500 to 17,000 eggs, depending on the species. Yet only about 10–15% of those eggs hatch, and from a single nest of several thousand eggs, an average of only two to four salmon survive the long journey to the ocean and eventually return as adults to spawn.

At first glance, this may seem extravagant, but it is precisely this abundance that allows the species to endure. In God's created order, life often flourishes not through careful rationing but through overwhelming generosity. The countless eggs that never become adult salmon are not evidence of a failed design but part of the very means by which salmon have continued to fill rivers and oceans for generations. It's almost as if God knew there would be bears and fishermen waiting upstream.

I. Seed That Appears Wasted

It is that very same abundance that Jesus places before us in the Parable of the Sower. The seed, that is, the Word of God, is scattered everywhere. It falls upon the hardened path, the shallow rocky ground, among the choking thorns, and upon the good soil. Yet only the good soil produces grain. From the perspective of the world, it looks terribly inefficient. Three out of the four soils produce nothing. Why would any farmer continue sowing like that? The answer, of course, is that this is no ordinary farmer. This is the Lord Himself, and the seed is His life-giving Word.

Yet if we are honest, we often think exactly like the unbelieving world. We are far more interested in results than in faithfulness. We want efficiency and a guarantee to act. We want to know beforehand who is worth our time, who is likely to believe, who is likely to reject, and who is not worth the effort. We would rather inspect the soil than scatter the seed. How often have you decided that someone was beyond hope? I know that I have been guilty of this sinful thinking. We say to ourselves, "They're too far gone." "They'll never come to church." "They're too set in their ways." "They've rejected Christianity their whole life." So, we never speak, never invite, and never confess Christ to them. How often do we quietly conclude that the seed would simply be wasted on them?

Or perhaps the person you've given up on is yourself. You have heard God's promises so many times that you no longer expect them to change you. You come to church, hear absolution, receive Christ's body and blood, and yet secretly wonder whether any of it is doing any good. You begin to treat the means of grace as though they are ineffective because you cannot immediately measure the results.

That way of thinking reveals something ugly within us. When we find ourselves wanting to be lords of the harvest and to be the determiners of where the seed of the Word of God should go and where it should not, we have crossed into dangerous thinking. That thinking eventually leads us to dare to assume that we would improve upon God's method if only He would ask our advice. We forget that by nature, every one of us is the hardened path, the shallow soil, and the thorn-infested ground. Apart from God's gracious work, none of us would bear fruit. Only God can prepare a heart to receive His Word.

II. The Power of The Seed

Thanks be to God that the power has never been in the soil. It has always been in the seed. That is the great comfort found within this parable. The same seed of the Word of God falls on the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and the good soil, and the seed does not change because the soil changes. It remains exactly what it always is: the living and life-giving Word of God. The problem is never the seed. The problem is the sinful heart. Yet that same Word possesses the power to accomplish what no sinner could ever accomplish for himself.

That is why St. Peter describes the Gospel in this way:

"Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you." (1 Peter 1:23–25)

Peter rightly calls the Word of God an imperishable seed. Every philosophy, every movement, every bestseller, every self-help program, and every human religion eventually fades away. The wisdom of this world changes with every generation. But the seed of God's Word never loses its power. Sure, human words can persuade, motivate, entertain, and even manipulate. But the words of man, if they are not the inspired and inerrant Word, can never create faith. They can never forgive sins and give life to all who were once spiritually dead. Only God's righteous and perfect declarations can do that.

The sheer beauty of the parable is not merely that the seed bears fruit. It is that God has chosen to save the world through those means which seem so ordinary. As written in the Augsburg Confession:

"That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake." (Augsburg Confession V)

The emphasis is so clear in Scripture and the confessions that we cannot afford to miss it. The Holy Spirit works faith when and where God pleases. Not when it pleases us or when we have finally identified someone worthy of hearing the Gospel. God has never commanded His Church to predict the harvest. He has commanded His Church to sow the seed. That means the very fact that you are sitting here today believing in Christ is not a testimony to the quality of your soil but to the power of His seed.

There was nothing in you that deserved His mercy. Yet Christ did not pass you by. He did not wait for you to become soil that was ready to receive Him. Instead, in the deepest love for you, He sowed His Word into your dead heart. Not only has he claimed you as "heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:21) in Holy Baptism, but he has continued to proclaim absolution to your ears through His called and ordained ministers and has fed you with His own body and blood to give you sure and certain evidence that your sins are indeed forgiven.

It is through those very means that the Holy Spirit has been doing what only He can do. He has created our faith, strengthened it, preserved it, and produced fruit where there was once only death. That is the beauty of our Lord's "wasteful" sowing. He continues to cast His life-giving Word upon sinners who do not deserve it, because His confidence has never rested in the soil. It has always rested in the power of His own Word.

III. Let Us Be Wasteful Sowers

Remember the salmon. From the world's perspective, thousands of eggs appear wasted. Yet through that extravagant abundance, rivers continue to be filled with life. So, our Lord also continues to scatter His life-giving Word. Much of it appears to fall on deaf ears. Some reject it, some ignore it, and some fall away. Yet Christ has never stopped sowing because He knows the power is not in the soil but in the seed. And by that very "wasteful" sowing, He has filled heaven itself with redeemed sinners, including you.

You see, we often think evangelism begins with courage. It does not. It begins with faith. Faith that God's Word actually does what He says it does. Faith that the Holy Spirit still works through preaching, Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. Faith that Christ has not given His Church a failing method but His own living and active Word. And that also changes the way we view our congregation. We must confess that if the growth of God's Kingdom depended upon us, we would have every reason to be reserved with where His Word is sent out. It would require us to become experts at reading people and spend our days trying to figure out who might believe and who won't. Our witness would become a calculation, and every confession of Christ would require us first to determine whether the effort would be worth it. But that is the gravest error of the Christian life.

It is so easy to become discouraged when pews are not as full as we would like. But Christ has never measured His Church that way. He asks only one question: Was the seed faithfully sown? If His Word has been preached in its truth and purity, if sinners have been absolved, if Baptism has been administered according to His institution, if His body and blood have been given for the forgiveness of sins, then the Sower has been at work among His people.

Since we are indeed His people, let us also be wasteful with invitations to Divine Service. Let us be wasteful with reading the Scriptures in our homes and praying together with one another. Let us be wasteful with teaching our children and grandchildren. Let us be wasteful with speaking Christ to those who have wandered. Let us be wasteful with forgiveness, just as Christ has been wasteful with His mercy toward us.

It should not surprise us when some of the seed falls on bad soil. Our Lord told us it would happen. But by His grace, some will also fall upon good soil and bear fruit because the Word of God has never lost its power. And one day, when the final harvest comes, we will stand among a multitude that no one can number. That is only possible because our Lord has been extravagantly generous with us. May we therefore never be stingy with His Gospel. Let us be wasteful sowers.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott